

Introduction

Sinclair Lewis' novel *Babbitt* was published in 1922. It deals with the everyday life of the realtor George F. Babbitt and a crisis which he experiences. The action takes place in a fictitious city called Zenith at the beginning of the twenties. The novel depicts the protagonist in a number of situations of everyday life. With this, the narrator also shows various aspects of life in Zenith, so that the reader receives a quite complete picture of the conditions of life and the attitudes of the society in Zenith.

Although the field of art is only entered upon incidentally in the novel, it serves as an interesting point of departure for an analysis of the text: The depiction of what people consider as art or of the way they deal with art can be indicative of their general attitude toward life. Moreover, the idea of art that is predominant in a society can also give information about the priorities which count there. Building up on this, I aim at showing that art as a topic in *Babbitt* serves to illustrate the materialism and simple-mindedness of the greater part of the society in Zenith. Here, the only art which really matters is the art of business. Any other kind of art is only good for entertainment, profit or boast, and this implies a cultural impoverishment. In order to prove these statements, I regard various aspects in relationship with art that are exemplary for the concept of art which is predominant in Zenith.

This paper consists of two parts. The first part treats art as a topic in *Babbitt* by analyzing and interpreting various exemplary aspects. The first chapter of this part deals with Babbitt's attitude toward art. Since he represents a typical middle-class citizen of Zenith, his idea of art can probably be applied to the majority of the population. Therefore, his attitude is examined in a more detailed way. The next chapter is dedicated to Chum Frink as an example of an artist in Zenith. Then, the usage of art terms in the narrative comment is regarded. The fourth chapter treats architecture and interior decoration as examples of art. Finally, there is a survey of other fields of art that are touched upon in the novel. All these aspects are examined

considering above all the kind of context in which art plays a role and the conditions that are possibly criticized by the way art is mentioned. The second part of the paper is dedicated to a short examination of the stylistic means that Lewis uses to represent art as a topic. In the conclusion, the results of the preceding chapters are summed up briefly.

1. Art as a topic

1.1. George Babbitt

Babbitt's attitude towards art becomes clear by means of a series of his thoughts and utterances. A selection of those will be used in the following to describe his idea of art.

Let me first explain Babbitt's concept of literature to exemplify his general idea of art. His concept of good literature becomes visible when he is looking in Verona's room for a book that he might read: ". . . he examined her books: Conrad's 'Rescue,' . . . 'Figures of Earth,' poetry . . . by Vachel Lindsay, and essays by H. L. Mencken. . . . He liked none of the books. In them he felt a spirit of rebellion against niceness and solid-citizenship. These authors . . . did not seem to care about telling a good story which would enable a fellow to forget his troubles" (Lewis 271).

According to this, literature functions to entertain the reader enabling him to relax and to divert himself. A book which does not fulfill this function is not a good book for Babbitt. Moreover, he does not accept literature which represents opinions that differ from his own. This means that for him good literature must neither make the reader feel bad to incite him to critical thinking, nor is it allowed to be in favor of opinions that are rejected by his social environment. Thus, Babbitt characterizes good literature by its confirmation of the existing social order and by its function of entertainment.

Babbitt's concept of literature can as well be applied without change to other fields of art. When he appears in the role of a recipient of art, he goes to the movies only to divert himself (cf. Lewis 156). Besides, he reads comical newspaper cartoons, which are "his favorite literature and art" (Lewis 76). Babbitt perceives art in these cases merely as something that enables him to relax and to distract him from his daily routine.

Another aspect of the function of art for Babbitt is its use in terms of material gain. For example, he explains to his son: " . . . there's a whole lot of valuable time lost even at the U.[niversity], studying poetry and French and subjects that never brought in anybody a cent" (Lewis 85). Therefore, profitability is his criterion for a "good" subject, and if it is not profitable, it is not worth being studied. Babbitt never realizes that there could be a function of art that is deeper than just entertainment or money-making. Instead, he invariably finds straightforward pragmatic reasons for the occupation with art. A good example for this is his answer to his son when he complains about having to study Shakespeare in high school: "I'll tell you why you have to study Shakespeare and those. It's because they're required for college entrance, and that's all there is to it!" (Lewis 76).

Babbitt also instrumentalizes art (in the following example, industrial art) as a symbol of status. This is evident after the description of his fine alarm-clock: "Babbitt was proud of being awakened by such a rich device. Socially it was almost as creditable as buying expensive cord tires" (Lewis 3-4). He has this type of alarm-clock in order to show off with the money he can afford to spend and not because he likes something special about its style.

Babbitt condemns the kind of art which he does not understand or which has no practical use for him - unless it serves him as an instrument to boast either about himself or about the society of which he is a proud member. For example, in a conversation with Tanis he finds out that she likes classical music and tells her: "Well, of course, I go to lots of these highbrow

concerts . . . ’ “ (Lewis 282), trying to impress her before he discloses her his preference for jazz.

Babbitt boasts of the society whose member he is, and in doing this, he reveals another aspect of his understanding of art. In a speech which he delivers at an official dinner he describes the ideal citizen:

“ . . . in the arts he invariably has a natural taste which makes him pick out the best, every time. In no country in the world will you find so many reproductions of the Old Masters and of well-known paintings on parlor walls as in these United States. No country has anything like our number of phonographs, with not only dance records and comic but also the best operas, such as Verdi, rendered by the world's highest-paid singers“ (Lewis 182).

Babbitt stresses the quantity of works of art to describe the aspect of quality. For him, the fact that so many people in the USA possess reproductions of famous paintings prove that they have a natural taste for the best art. He emphasizes the mere possession of an object of art to derive from this the good taste of its owner. He equates the possession of works of art with a good understanding of art and reveals thereby implicitly his materialistic thinking, as he does by his speaking of “the world's highest-paid singers“ (Lewis 182), because here he implicitly assumes that the highest-paid singers are equivalent with the best singers. Thus, there is a clear tendency of Babbitt to define quality in terms of quantity with regard to art.

Concerning the artists, he thinks in a similar way. This becomes obvious later in his speech at the dinner: “In other countries, art and literature are left to a lot of shabby bums living in attics and feeding on booze and spaghetti, but in America the successful writer or picture-painter is indistinguishable from any other decent business man . . .“ (Lewis 182).

This statement only refers to the successful artist, and success is a material criterion. The success of an artist is not necessarily related to the good quality of his works, but Babbitt only

perceives the materialistic aspect of the topic. As a consequence, he sees the artist, which from his point of view seems to deserve this name only if he is successful, as a business man. For a businessman, it is important to sell as much as possible to enhance his income, but for an artist the success is only guaranteed if he makes sure that his works correspond to the taste of the majority. The realization of this concept is very likely to deprive his works from critical or innovatory approaches. This line of reasoning shows that Babbitt tends to restrict the notion of art to the field of popular art and to restrict the notion of a respectable artist to a successful artist.

Even if artists actually fulfill Babbitt's criteria for being regarded as good and respectable, they are still potential suspects of indecent behavior for him. One of his friends, the poet Chum Frink, is such a respectable artist for him, but when Frink presides over a séance at Babbitt's party, he is alarmed and thinks: “ ‘Suppose Chum Frink was really one of these spiritualists! Chum had, for a literary fellow, always seemed to be a Regular Guy . . . But suppose that secretly - After all, you never could tell about these darn highbrows; and to be an out-and-out spiritualist would be almost like being a socialist!’ “ (Lewis 127). Despite his good opinion of Frink, Babbitt cannot trust him completely just because he claims to belong to the world of arts. Babbitt has a distrust of artists as he distrusts all intellectuals, because he seems to be afraid of not understanding what they might say and because their works are liable to deviate from the accepted average promoted by the majority.

The impossibility of a simple, comprehensive and definitive categorization of the meaning of art is therefore a factor that worries Babbitt. He would like to apply the criteria of business to the field of art to achieve there the same kind of standardization that takes place in society and economy at that time. He comments a crash course in learning to play an instrument as follows: “ ‘There’s no reason why, if efficiency-experts put their minds to it the way they have

to routing products in a factory, they couldn't figure out some scheme so a person wouldn't have to monkey with all this practising and exercises that you get in music' " (Lewis 84).

This is typical of his concept of art. He actually looks for a way to remove the aspect of the artistic from the arts, "artistic" meaning the imaginative, creative and ambiguous. He would like to standardize art and the process of becoming an artist in the same way as the industry standardizes its production, resulting in a simple and clear mechanical process that creates popular products suitable for the taste of the majority.

Babbitt's concept of art can be summed as follows:

Art deserves to be called "good" if it serves for mere entertainment and distraction and if it respects the popular opinions. Art should bring material gain, and if it does not, it can at least be used as a symbol of status or as something to boast in general. Moreover, respectable art is equivalent to popular art, and the quality of art can be derived from its price or success. Art should also be standardizable to make it more easily understandable, but even if it is popular and understandable, art as well as its creator can always be suspected of lacking the respect towards the points of view of the majority.

Thus, Babbitt's idea of art discloses his plain materialism and his own adaptation to the popular points of view as a means to maintain his social status. Since he stands exemplarily for the middle class society, the presentation of this concept of art also shows and criticizes implicitly the tendency towards intellectual impoverishment as an effect of the materialism and of the standardization trend in many fields of the American society of the twenties.

1.2. Chum Frink

The figure of Chum Frink is exemplary for the concept of art valid in Zenith. This becomes already clear in the very first comment about him in the novel: ". . . T.Cholmondeley Frink,

the poet and advertising-agent . . . “ (Lewis 59). Here, the narrator mentions Frink as an artist and a businessman. Thus, it seems that art and business go together in Zenith.

The following description of Frink’s art reveals something about its quality: “Despite the searching philosophy and high morality of his verses, they were humorous and easily understood by any child of twelve; and it added a neat air of pleasantry to them that they were set not as verse but as prose“ (Lewis 111-112). This narrative comment suggests that there is actually no literary demand in Frink’s poetry, because it does not mention criteria that justify the quality of a literary work, like complexity or innovatory aspects, but it only refers to features that can be applied to any kind of writing without justifying a literary demand. According to this, Frink’s poetry seems to be void of complexity or innovatory aspects, and this assumption is easily corroborated by the following look at an extract of his writings.

In one of his speeches, Babbitt quotes one of Frink’s poems: “*But when I get that lonely spell, I simply seek the best hotel, no matter in what town I be - St. Paul, Toledo, or K.C., in Washington, Schnenechdaty, in Louisville or Albany. And at that inn it hits my dome that I again am right at home*“ (Lewis 185). This is simple language with colloquial terms (“*dome*“), a plain rhythm (“*But when I get that lonely spell*“), enumerations (“*St. Paul, Toledo, or K.C.*“) and above all a straightforward meaning, because there is no space for complex interpretations. This extract, like the poem as a whole (cf. Lewis 185-186), is a praise of the standardization and uniformity of the American society at that time: People can feel like at home in any American town, because all American towns are the same. The clearness and plainness of Frink’s writing along with its standardized verse shows that this so-called poetry is itself a product of standardization, and its propagandistic message proves its proximity to advertising. This is the link between Frink’s being a poet and an advertising-agent: His poetry is merely another kind of advertising, so that his art is only another kind of business. He cannot create critical and innovatory art, because his writings have to be as popular as

possible, and this is only practicable if he produces literature that is conforming to the taste of the majority.

Yet Frink knows very well that his literary production is absolutely undemanding. He reveals this one night when he is drunk and meets Babbitt on the street:

“ ‘I’m traitor to poetry . . . I could ‘ve been a Gene Field or a James Whitcomb Riley. Maybe a Stevenson . . . And whadi write? Tripe! Cheer-up poems. All tripe! Could have written - too late!’ “ (Lewis 272).

The preceding quotation shows exemplarily that the artists in Zenith are at least conscious of the undemanding quality of their art. Frink is actually aware of the low quality of the literature that he creates, although he does not admit this under normal circumstances. He would have liked to write more demanding literature, but he has submitted to the taste of the majority in order to be successful in his business.

When he delivers a speech in favor of the foundation of a symphony orchestra in Zenith, Frink also proves that he is actually no artist, but a mere businessman. He says:

“ ‘Culture has become as necessary an adornment and advertisement for a city to-day as pavements or bank-clearances . . . The thing to do then . . . is to *capitalize Culture* ; to go right out and grab it’ “ (Lewis 261).

This shows that art as a part of culture in general is nothing more than an “adornment and advertisement“ for him - this is at least what he says in public. According to him, the function of art is that it can yield profit, and this proves that art is synonymous with business in Zenith.

To sum it up briefly, Chum Frink is representative for the artists in Zenith: His art is confined to the business of advertisement which also includes what he calls poetry. He is a businessman because he produces in accordance with the taste of the majority and because he sees the function of culture in its possible profitability. His example makes clear that business is the only art that is really accepted in Zenith.

1.3. The usage of art terms in the narrative comment

The way in which the narrator uses terms from the field of art in certain contexts contributes a few aspects to the consideration of the art topic in the novel. These comments are often ironic and help to expose the true idea of art of the society depicted in *Babbitt*.

In the beginning of the novel, the narrator says the following about the protagonist: “. . . he made nothing in particular, neither butter nor shoes nor poetry . . . “ (Lewis 2).

In this case, poetry is part of an enumeration that includes food and clothing, which are both articles of industrial production. By mentioning poetry as a field of art along with industrial products, the reader has the impression that this art is merely another branch of industry. This would imply that art can be standardized and fabricated in a mass production like any other industrial product. In this context, art has nothing to do with creativity and fantasy. There is even a strong contradiction between these notions and the idea of art that is presented here. Thus, the narrator introduces the reader to the relationship of the society in *Babbitt* to art from the very beginning.

The description of Babbitt's Boosters' Club button reads: “With the conciseness of great art the button displayed two words: ‘Boosters - Pep!’ It made Babbitt feel loyal and important“ (Lewis 10). The slogan on the button is termed as “great art“ with the quality of expressing a lot of things in only a few words, but here the words are so plain and clear that their status as a mere publicity slogan without any creative feature becomes quite evident. The button helps Babbitt to feel important, and this may be the true reason why the reference to “great art“ is justified: Again, something that can be called art according to the protagonist serves the purpose of boasting or promoting. Therefore, this quotation is apt to exemplify the plain practical function that society assigns to art in this novel.

The integration of the notion of art into everyday life is illustrated with regard to cars: “To George F. Babbitt, as to most prosperous citizens of Zenith, his motor car was poetry and tragedy, love and heroism“ (Lewis 24). Two fields of art, poetry and tragedy, are used to describe the relationship of people to an industrial article, and this shows in an ironic way what relationship people have to art: Art itself, in this case poetry or tragedy, plays no role in their life any more. Instead, industrial products like cars are in the center of attention.

When the protagonist writes business letters, the narrator describes this activity and refers to “the new school of Poets of Business“ (Lewis 36). This designation treats the lack of creative, critical and suggestive art in this society for which business seems to be the only art that is really respectable. The expression “Poets of Business“ constitutes an oxymoron which indicates the clash between the needs of the business world and the needs of the world of the artistic. Business with its call for standardization, uniformity and practice thrusts aside the area of fantasy and free creation to admit a concept of art that primarily refers to business itself as an art and that tolerates art only for the purpose of distraction.

When Babbitt writes some business correspondence, the narrator comments ironically: “It was a morning of artistic creation“ (Lewis 38). This sentence makes clear what idea there is in Zenith about art and the artistic: Business is equivalent with art, and being a businessman means being artistic. All importance lies in business, and critical or innovatory art has become meaningless under these circumstances.

The excess of practical orientation and superficiality in the society of Zenith is implicitly criticized when the narrator speaks about Vergil Gunch: “He was a jolly man, given to oratory and to chumminess with the arts. He called on the famous actors and vaudeville artists when they came to town, gave them cigars, addressed them by their first names . . . “ (Lewis 56). Having read the first sentence, the reader is prepared to receive an explanation of Gunch’s familiarity with the arts, and he expects for example that Gunch is a frequent visitor of

museums or art galleries or an expert in literature. This expectation is deceived, though, because his knowledge of the arts only refers to the fact that he is acquainted with some actors who keep in touch with him. Thus, the narrator shows again ironically the meaning of arts in Zenith: It is important to maintain one's social relationships and to be popular, and that is a significant art in Zenith, whereas knowledge about arts like literature or painting are meaningless.

1.4. Architecture and interior decoration

The role of art in Zenith becomes also clear by a look at the way in which architecture and interior decoration are described in the novel.

Architecture is already important in the very first sentence of *Babbitt*: “The towers of Zenith aspired above the morning mist; austere towers of steel and cement and limestone . . . They were neither citadels nor churches, but frankly and beautifully office-buildings“(Lewis 1).

The architecture which is described here is destitute of any decoration. The austerity in the construction style of these towers indicates pure functionality: The buildings have the function to serve as places of work. Therefore, their architecture dispenses with all the decorative elements that are not necessary to fulfill that function. The fact that these towers are office-buildings also accounts for their functionality, because they represent business, and efficiency and utility are essential in the world of business. Since they have no immediate function, decoration and ornaments are superfluous here, so that the art of architecture is reduced to the art of maximum functionality. The following description of the Reeves Building is another illustration of this architectural style:

“The Reeves Building was as fireproof as a rock and as efficient as a typewriter; fourteen stories of yellow pressed brick, with clean, upright, unornamented lines“ (Lewis 32).

Therefore, the architecture in Zenith exemplifies the conditions under which art is produced in Zenith: It has to serve the needs of business, so that it is oriented toward plainness and functionality.

Interior decoration also discloses something about the role of art in Zenith. In this context, the description of the Babbitts' bedroom and house is interesting:

It was a masterpiece among bedrooms . . . Only it had nothing to do with the Babbitts, nor with any one else . . . It had the air of being a very good room in a very good hotel . . . Every second house in Floral Heights had a bedroom precisely like this . . . The Babbitts' house . . . had the best of taste, the best of inexpensive rugs, a simple and laudable architecture, and the latest conveniences. . . . In fact there was but one thing wrong with the Babbitt house: It was not a home (Lewis 14-15).

The quotation shows how impersonal and standardized the Babbitts' house is: It is true that the interior decoration is of high quality and up-to-date, but it is a standard decoration, and its neutrality makes that nobody really feels at home there. Thus, the standardization in interior decoration deprives the occupants of the houses of a part of their individuality and establishes a uniformity in housing. The advantage of this standardization is that the houses are cheaper due to mass production, but this implies a loss in individuality which does not seem to be important for the occupants. This is the material aspect of standardization which can be compared to the intellectual aspect of the conformity of thinking in Zenith.

The description of the dining-room of the Athletic Club delivers another aspect of interior decoration: "It was lofty and half-timbered, with . . . a somewhat musicianless musicians'-gallery, and tapestries believed to illustrate the granting of Magna Charta. . . . at one end of the room was a heraldic and hooded stone fireplace . . . no fire had ever been built in it" (Lewis 59). The Athletic Club seems to dispose of some elements of interior decoration, like a

musicians'-gallery and a fireplace, only for the sake of having them. They are in no way necessary for the club, and the only function that is imaginable for them is boasting of the club's wealth and prestige. In fact, the club's advertising-pamphlet speaks of the considerable dimensions and the highly sophisticated draught of the fireplace (cf. Lewis 59), but since it has never been used, its function of mere boasting is quite obvious here. Therefore, the role of art in this context is boasting of an organization, so that art is instrumentalized as advertisement. The only thing that matters as to the quality of this art is that it looks expensive or that it is up-to-date; features like artistic merit or demanding quality do not count.

Summing up, it may be said that architecture and interior decoration in *Babbitt* illustrate the functional aspect of art in Zenith: Art is used as advertisement and treated as a standardizable item, and this shows that its role is reduced to its usefulness for business.

1.5. Other fields of art touched upon in the novel

In *Babbitt*, there are also some references to cinema, theater, painting and music which help to complete the impression that the reader obtains about the idea of art in Zenith.

As to the cinema, the favorite movies of the Babbitts are described (cf. Lewis 156). They prefer movies which entertain them in a straightforward way by provoking feelings like joy or sentimentality, and these movies have a quite plain plot, like western and slapstick. Another example is the interest of Eunice Littlefield in the world of the movies (cf. Lewis 225). She reads the motion-picture magazines, and the description of these magazines illustrates the business which has been built around the movies, so that it becomes clear that the cinema is only another branch of business.

The theater plays a role when Babbitt is in Monarch and visits the Old Colony Theatre along with other realtors to see a burlesque show that was announced in the *Monarch Herald* (cf. Lewis 172-173). Another example is the musical comedy which Babbitt and his son see in

Chicago (cf. Lewis 243). In both cases, the visit of the theater is mere entertainment for distraction, and in the whole novel nobody goes to the theater to see a classical play or Shakespeare. According to this, it is the function of the theater to offer simple, straightforward and diverting entertainment.

The art of painting is relevant in the description of the Babbitts' parlor (cf. Lewis 91-92). Here, it is mentioned that there are the same reproductions of paintings in nearly every house in Floral Heights. This illustrates that paintings are used as a standardized item to complete the interior decoration, but their style or quality is not important, and nobody in the novel speaks about that. Paintings seem to be only good for decoration. In one of his speeches, Babbitt even boasts about the high quantity of reproductions in parlors to show the greatness of the USA (cf. Lewis 182). When Babbitt is in the dining-room of a hotel, he enjoys the splendid decoration which also consists of the portraits of French kings (cf. Lewis 248). These two examples make clear that painting can be used as decoration or as a kind of advertisement, but the actual artistic value of the paintings is never a topic for anybody in the novel.

With regard to music, Chum Frink's speech in favor of a Symphony Orchestra for Zenith proves that music has the function to be good for the business in Zenith, because it might attract rich investors (cf. Lewis 260-261). Another aspect becomes clear by the following narrative comment about the Babbitts: ". . . their store of jazz records made them feel wealthy and cultured . . ." (Lewis 92). The mere possession of music records seems to be sufficient for them to regard themselves as cultured, and neither the question if they listen to them nor what quality the music has is important for the Babbitts. These two examples illustrate that music in Zenith is only relevant because it can be used for business or for boasting.

To sum it up, the four fields of art presented above show that art in Zenith is only decoration, entertainment or a means to gain profit.

2. The representation of art as a topic

In order to represent art as a topic in *Babbitt*, Sinclair Lewis makes use of various stylistic means which are analyzed in the following.

Lewis' chief rhetoric device is irony. The essence of irony is expressing the contrast of what one actually wants to say, with the intention to criticize or ridicule something. With regard to art, the narrator criticizes the notion of art that is predominant in Zenith, and he does so by the recurrent usage of art vocabulary in the text: "With the conciseness of great art . . ." (Lewis 10) or "By a tragedy familiar to the world of art . . ." (Lewis 39) are examples which illustrate the irony of this usage of art terms.

In the first case, the "great art" refers to the plain slogan of the Boosters' Club button which consists of only two words (cf. Lewis 10), but this "conciseness" is the only thing that it has in common with "great art." The slogan is mere advertising, and this shows the contradiction between the actual quality of the slogan and the quality which is ascribed to it. The irony consists in this contrast, and by employing it, the narrator ridicules the Boosters' Club slogan and with it the importance of the Boosters' Club.

In the second case, the "tragedy" relates to the fact that Babbitt is stimulated to write an advertisement by the good mood of one of his employees whose idea was rejected by Babbitt (cf. Lewis 39). Here, the irony consists in the contrast between the everyday life activity of Babbitt and his employee and the extraordinary importance that is assigned to it by the reference to "tragedy" and "world of art." What really happens is so simple and unimportant that it is the clear contrast of tragedy, and if the writing of plain advertisement letters is connected with the "world of art", this shows what qualities art has in this context: It is

undemanding, simple and functional. Therefore, the narrator ridicules the importance of Babbitt's activities and criticizes the idea of art of the businessmen.

As the preceding examples prove, the art vocabulary of the narrative comment is used ironically in the novel, because the art terms here are generally employed to designate simple, undemanding, unimportant and everyday-life things, whereas the terms never refer to something complex, demanding, important and extraordinary.

The narrator uses a number of rhetoric devices that help to convey irony. For example, Chum Frink is called "a Famous Poet" (Lewis 119). Here, the usage of capitalization supports the irony, because it suggests that he is so important that his profession even deserves capital letters, but in reality his writings are well-known, but of undemanding quality.

The comparison is another means to help express irony. After Babbitt has written a form-letter, the narrator says that ". . . he intoned it now like a poet delicate and distrait . . ." (Lewis 36). Babbitt is compared to a poet, but the form-letter he has written is only a straightforward advertisement. Through this comparison, Babbitt's unimportance becomes clear and the high opinion which he has about his profession is ridiculed.

A further example is the usage of the oxymoron in the following quotation: ". . . a somewhat musicianless musicians'-gallery . . ." (Lewis 59). The context is the description of the Athletic Club, and the contradiction between the adjective "musicianless" and the noun "musicians'-gallery" is an oxymoron that also creates irony because it illustrates the actual uselessness of this gallery and stresses that the only reason for its existence is that the club can boast of it.

Irony is also conveyed by producing a contrast between expectation and fictional reality: ". . . the fortnightly form-letter . . . was diligently imitative of the best literary models of the day . . ." (Lewis 36). Reading this, one expects that this form-letter imitates literature of high and demanding quality, but the continuation of the sentence makes clear that these "literary

models“ are only business advertisements (cf. Lewis 36). Therefore, the fictional reality is the contrast of what one actually expects, and this contrast implies a criticism of the art concept in the business world. If plain advertisements are “the best literary models of the day“ for the businessmen, this means that for them the best art is simple, practical and undemanding, and everything else does not seem to matter.

The following quotation is an example for irony which is created by means of a zeugma : “They were newly rich contractors who, having bought houses, motors, hand-painted pictures, and gentlemanliness, were now buying a refined ready-made philosophy“ (Lewis 356). Here, the narrator combines in the manner of a zeugma concrete and abstract things with the verb “to buy.“ Yet only concrete items can be bought, whereas “gentlemanliness“ and “philosophy“ are abstract notions that actually cannot be purchased. Here, the narrator criticizes the materialism of people who think that money can buy everything, even intellectual qualities.

As to the representation of art as a topic, the narrator also makes use of the two basic techniques of representations, namely telling and showing.

He uses telling for example when he describes buildings like the Reeves Building (cf. Lewis 32) or interior decorations, for example the decoration of the Babbitt’s bedroom (cf. Lewis 14-15). In the case of telling, the fictional reality is filtered through the perspective of the narrator. Thus, the reader can derive the respective idea of art from the biased observations of the narrator.

With showing, however, the fictional reality is presented quasi-objectively to the reader, as if there were no biased intermediary. Regarding art as a topic, showing is used for example when poems by Frink are quoted (cf. Lewis 113 and 185-186). Here, the reader can form his own opinion about the quality of what is called “art“ in Zenith by reading a piece of what is called “poetry“ there.

On the whole, Lewis' representation of the art topic is satiric, because he uses above all irony with the exaggeration and mockery which it implies to ridicule and criticize the concept of art that is predominant in Zenith.

Conclusion

In *Babbitt*, art as a topic is represented in a satiric way to criticize and ridicule the idea of art which is predominant in Zenith. According to the observations from the preceding chapters, art is mainly used for entertainment, decoration, advertisement, profit and boasting. It is seen and treated like a common commercial business, and the criterion which is applied for its assessment is above all its functionality: Art must be able to entertain or it must be profitable. Aesthetic or demanding quality is not important, and the consequence of this attitude toward art becomes clear through the testimonies of art in Zenith which the narrator provides, above all the extracts from Chum Frink's writings: Simple, straightforward, undemanding and everyday things are accepted as art, whereas complex, aesthetically demanding and socio-critical works of art are almost completely ignored. When art with demanding quality is a topic in the novel, its relevance merely refers to its commercial profitability.

The negative effects of the trend toward standardization are another aspect which is illustrated through the art topic. In the novel, art is presented as a standardizable article among others, and it is standardized to gain profit. Yet standardization implies loss in variety and uniformity, because it is only possible if one considers the taste of the majority to ensure the maximum profit. Thus, the standardization of art leads to cultural impoverishment. The uniformity that results from this corresponds to the conformity on the social level which is the consequence of the " 'standardization of thought' " (Lewis 101).

To sum it up briefly, it can be said that the art topic is used to criticize the materialistic and simple-minded thinking in Zenith. This fictitious city may be representative of all the

American cities of the twenties, and from this point of view, Lewis' criticism refers to the materialism and the simple-minded thinking of the greater part of the American society of the twenties.

Bibliography

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